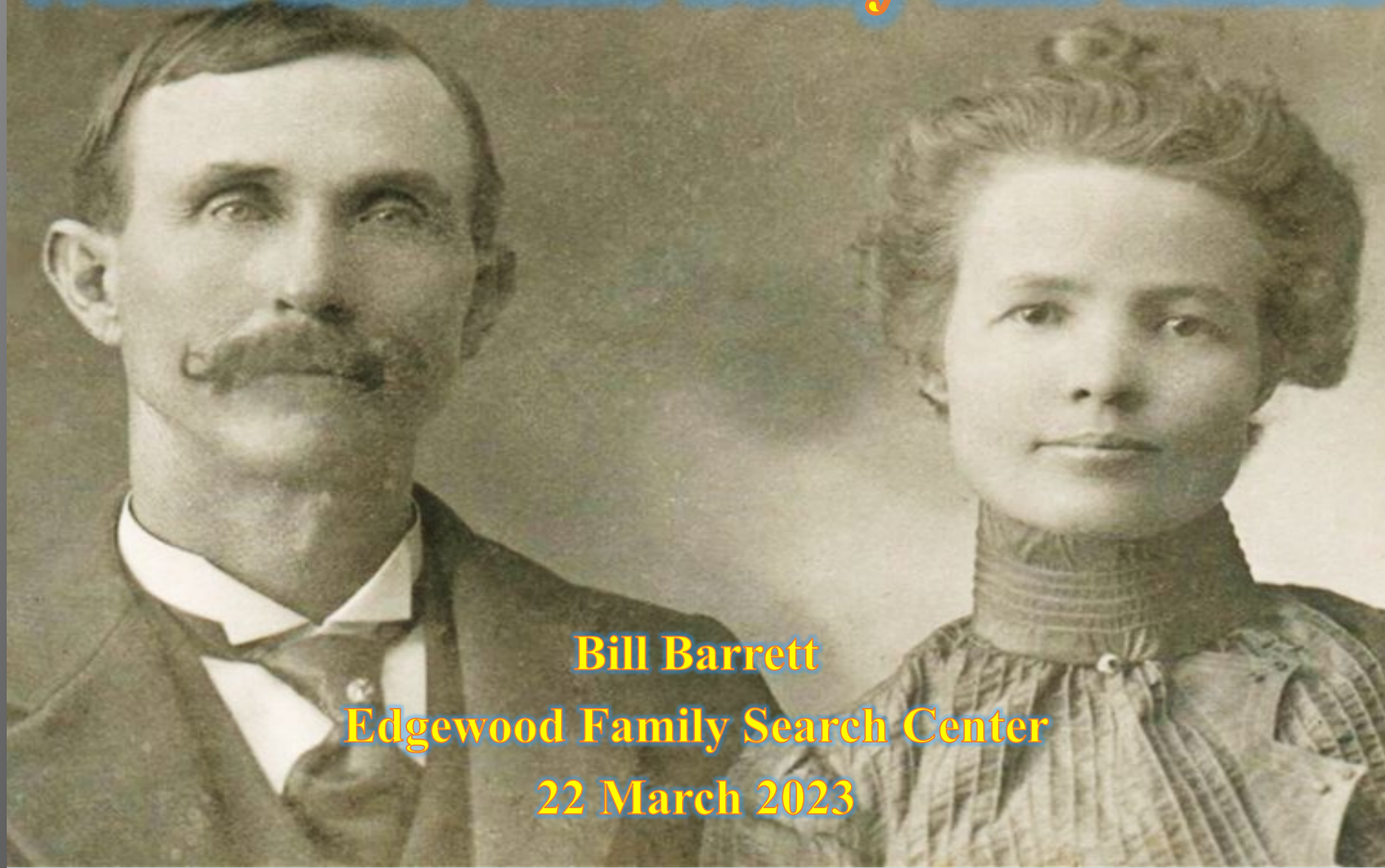


Write Your Life Story and Theirs



Bill Barrett

Edgewood Family Search Center

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Your Life Story



Purpose: There are Many Reasons for Writing Your Life Story

- ☐ **First, you are a witness to future generations.**
- ☐ **Second, you introduce yourself to your posterity in a very real and loving way.**
- ☐ **Third, you want your stories to represent you.**
- ☐ **Fourth, you put perspective and purpose in your life.**
- ☐ **“A life lived today may not seem like real history, but it will be to future generations.”***

Dixon, Janice T., Ph. D., “Family Focused: A Step-by-Step Guide to Writing Your Autobiography and Family History”, Mount Olympus Publishing, Wendover, NV, 89883, 1997, ISBN 0-9656919-6-9 ; Chapter 1, “Why Write Your History?”

FamilySearch Wiki: 1 “Writing Your Family and Personal History” and 6 “Creating A Personal History”

* “Write Your Life Story”, the fhguide item g



Getting Started

- ☐ **A question: How do you eat an elephant? Answer: One bite at a time.**
- ☐ **Writing a life story can be a daunting task, so**
- ☐ **Start easy with short writings that can be done in one sitting.**
- ☐ **Don't worry about spelling, punctuation, or grammar**
- ☐ **Write quickly with whatever comes to mind.**
- ☐ **The errors can be corrected later**
- ☐ **Organize writing in chronological order – you can do it later in another format**



Gathering Background Information

☐ Remember:

- ❖ Family stories need to be verified as much as possible
- ❖ Government and legal documents can contain mistakes

☐ Gather everything together and organize your records

- ❖ Find and organize all your records in a way that is meaningful to you.
- ❖ Copy/scan the most important documents and photos
- ❖ Keep the originals in acid-free folders or sheet protectors;
- ❖ Use the copies to write from
- ❖ Backup all computer files
- ❖ All of this so you can easily find and protect what you need

☐ Time period organization is convenient for most people:



Writing: Family and Birth

- ☐ **Start with “I was born ...” and go from there**
- ☐ **Write about your birth**
- ☐ **Online or at a library find newspapers from around the time of your birth and add background information.**
- ☐ **Write about your parents and other important people in your life**



Writing: Turning Points in Your Life

- ☐ **Start with turning points - the most important events in your life.**
 - ❖ They should be the heart of a complete history.
 - ❖ No time to write a complete history?
 - Write about the turning points.
 - Gives you most important events.
 - You can always add to it when you have the time.

- ☐ **What are turning points?**
 - ❖ The times when your life suddenly changed.
 - ❖ Just when everything is going along fine, something comes along and forces a change.

- ☐ **Can be negative or positive.**

- ☐ **Can be emotional and usually stressful.**



How Do You Write About Turning Points?

- ☐ **Depends on how much you remember, the age you were when it happened, and how recently it happened.**
- ☐ **Emotional events only a few years old will be more difficult to write about.**
- ☐ **Ideally, your story would include:**
 - ❖ **Background - what was going on in your life when the turning point happened**
 - ❖ **Rising action – what were the immediate events that preceded the turning point**
 - ❖ **Describe the turning point**
 - ❖ **Evaluate how it impacted your life**
 - ❖ **Include any photos, documents, or newspaper articles that describe the event**
- ☐ **Example: My first (bad) turning point was the deaths of my parents in an automobile accident when I was 9 years old.**



My First (Bad) Turning Point

☐ Background:

- ❖ Nine years old, seven-year-old sister,
- ❖ School ok, had friends,
- ❖ Mostly ignored my parents,
- ❖ Lived in Glendale, AZ

☐ Rising Action:

- ❖ My father, with friends and family, were going into partnership to farm in Yuma, AZ.
- ❖ They had driven to Yuma to buy lots for homes.
- ❖ My sister and I were staying with our cousins down the block with Grandmother
- ❖ They were driving home when the accident happened.

☐ The Event: Sunday, February 17, 1952, about 12:35am, a train / car accident killed six family members

☐ Evaluation:

- ❖ Went to live with Uncle Henry and Aunt Sybil in Glendale
- ❖ Moved to Yuma in 1953, away from friends and family in Glendale.
- ❖ Looking back, I saw that my sense of security was shattered.



Bring Your Story to Life With Compelling Details*

- ☐ **Make the story uniquely yours and interesting by adding compelling details.**
- ☐ **Correct use of details makes the difference between vivid writing and static writing.**
- ☐ **Use concrete details that are word pictures of things that can be seen and touched.**
- ☐ **Describe the person, place, or thing**
- ☐ **After description, add a story about or an example of that person, place, or thing**
- ☐ **Write about what your senses were telling you**
- ☐ **Time controls: write your story as you remember it happening**
- ☐ **Be concise**

* "Bring Your Ancestors' Stories to Life with Compelling Details", the fhguide, item b

Dixon, Janice T., Ph. D., "Family Focused: A Step-by-Step Guide to Writing Your Autobiography and Family History", Mount Olympus Publishing, Wendover, NV, 89883, 1997, ISBN 0-9656919-6-9 ; Chapter 6, "Enhance with Details"



Let Your Feelings Show

- ☐ **Don't write a resume as your life story.**
- ☐ **The stories we remember best are the emotional events.**
- ☐ **Sharing emotions shows you are genuine in your writing.**
- ☐ **How you felt when your mother died is more important than your high school grade point average.**
- ☐ **It is difficult to describe someone without showing your personal feelings about them.**
- ☐ **You don't have to go on and on about feelings, just state them simply. "I was afraid." "I loved."**



Show Your Story Instead of Telling It

- ❑ One of a writer's basic tools is dramatization - the ability to show an event happening.
- ❑ The difference between showing the story and telling the story.
 - ❖ *Telling* is narrative; factual, but not very interesting
 - ❖ *Showing* uses Dialogue, Descriptions, and Activities
- ❑ Set the scene
 - ❖ People involved
 - ❖ Place and time of action
 - ❖ What is happening
 - ❖ Emotion, personal dynamics
- ❑ Getting started:
 - ❖ Set the scene by giving background
 - ❖ Where and when the story took place
 - ❖ Tell about the people involved
 - ❖ Let the people speak and move



Other Items

☐ Humor:

- ❖ Enjoy your awkward moments with others.
- ❖ You allow others to get to know you better.
- ❖ Your story will be better for the fun you have had in your life.

☐ Reinforce with variety:

- ❖ Achievements, positions, honors, schooling, skills, hobbies
- ❖ Pets, family traditions, friends, summer vacations
- ❖ Memories of places and people important to you
- ❖ Give a sense of history that shaped your life

☐ There are many ways to end your autobiography just as there are many ways to write it.

☐ Make it exclusively yours.



Writing Your Family History

- ❑ **Most of what I have presented so far is also applicable to your families' histories.**
- ❑ **The decisions to be made are how many family lines and generations to include**
 - ❖ **3 – back to your grandparents?**
 - ❖ **4 – back to your great-grandparents?**
 - ❖ **Back as far as you can go?**
 - ❖ **OR – focusing on one or a few ancestors**
 - **With whom you feel a special connection,**
 - **Are special in some way,**
 - **Are famous or infamous,**
 - **Is the focus of a great story,**
 - **Or is the central character of a MAJOR TURNING POINT in your family that affected all subsequent generations**

Dixon, Janice T., Ph. D., “Family Focused: A Step-by-Step Guide to Writing Your Autobiography and Family History”, Mount Olympus Publishing, Wendover, NV, 89883, 1997, ISBN 0-9656919-6-9 ; Chapter 12, “Families are Important?”

FamilySearch Wiki: 2 “Preparing a Family History”, 4 “Start Family History by Writing What is Known”, 6 “What to do with the genealogy and family history I collected”, 8 “Create a Family History”, 9 “Tips for Writing Family History Books”



Why Write Your Family History?

- ☐ **You and your family are linked in many ways.**
- ☐ **The circumstances of their lives and the decisions made by the previous generations directly influence us and our descendants.**
- ☐ **The purpose of a family history book is to give as accurate an account of your family as possible.**
- ☐ **Your children need to know your parents, grandparents, and beyond as you know them, not as names and places and unsmiling photographs, but as warm, real people.**
- ☐ **Your family can become closer and more unified when you search out your family stories**
- ☐ **Preserving your “family narrative” is extremely beneficial to the emotional health of families and individuals**



How Do We Write Family History?

- ☐ Finding all the stories and photographs is a huge task, but critical.
- ☐ Where you start is the biggest question.
- ☐ You start with one person, one incident, and go from there.
- ☐ Easier if you break it up into segments.
- ☐ Many ways to write a family history
- ☐ Whatever way is the most logical to you



Starting Your Family History

- ☐ **Decide on a one-generational or multi-generational family history**
- ☐ **Unless you are an expert in family history, start with a one-generation history starting with your parent's generation**
- ☐ **The easiest way to start family history is to write about your parents first**
- ☐ **Concentrate on one person at a time**
- ☐ **Take it person by person, sketch by sketch, generation by generation.**
- ☐ **These are more than stories – they are the heritage that establishes your identity.**
- ☐ **As you search your past, you discover special qualities that reinforce your own individuality.**



Interviewing and Gathering Records

- ☐ **Contact elderly relatives and record/video their oral histories by interview while you can.**
- ☐ **Prepare a family history survey for family members to help with the collection of information.**
- ☐ **Ask family members to help you gather information on ancestors**
- ☐ **Collect written documents from family members.**
- ☐ **Collect the visual records – photographs, drawings, maps, slides, videos.**
- ☐ **Copy, scan, and photograph everything you can and return the originals.**
- ☐ **Search the internet for all these types of records and more.**



Set the Scene – Give Background

- ❑ **“Most family histories are sterile; they don’t give any background.”***
- ❑ **In addition to the usual documents, discover the world your ancestor lived in by finding less well-known types of records.**
- ❑ **Historical newspapers, particularly small-town weeklies, are an excellent source about the local history, society, customs, friends, associates, and neighbors**
 - ❖ **have a lot of “background”**
 - ❖ **mundane items that mention your family members by name – it sold subscriptions.**
- ❑ **As you go back in time trying to recreate a history of your family, you will find that you are less likely to judge or idealize your ancestor.**

***Everett Cooley, family history librarian at the University of Utah**

Dixon, Janice T., Ph. D., “Family Focused: A Step-by-Step Guide to Writing Your Autobiography and Family History”, Mount Olympus Publishing, Wendover, NV, 89883, 1997, ISBN 0-9656919-6-9 ; Chapter 14, “Setting the Scene”



Suggestions

- ☐ Write an outline to help you organize your story
- ☐ Sift out the important points
- ☐ Include anything applicable to your ancestor
- ☐ A timeline*, including local and national conditions and events, will help put your ancestor's life in perspective
- ☐ Document your sources – it is much easier now with Record Seek
- ☐ Copy / scan photos, documents, maps, etc.
- ☐ Work from the copied documents and photos
- ☐ Use acid-free materials to preserve the originals

*

- https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/United_States_Timeline
- https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/United_States_History
- <https://www.Americasbesthistory.com/abhtimeline1850.html>



Links to Your Past

- ☐ **Plug in national and local historical background into the timeline.**
- ☐ **You add another dimension to your ancestors when you place your ancestors in their historical background.**
- ☐ **You give the reader more family links with which they can relate.**
- ☐ **Did your ancestor help their country by military or other service?**
- ☐ **Other possible links**
 - ❖ **Country of origin**
 - ❖ **Family heirlooms**
 - ❖ **Food traditions**
 - ❖ **Business, vocation**
 - ❖ **Religious ties**
 - ❖ **Talents**
 - ❖ **Education**
 - ❖ **Family resemblance**



Getting to Know Your Ancestors

- ☐ Include photographs
- ☐ Add newspaper clippings
- ☐ Physical description.
- ☐ Accomplishments
- ☐ Emphasize the human qualities
- ☐ Relationships with other people – friends, associates, neighbors, even enemies
- ☐ Family pets
- ☐ Death information
- ☐ You want to try and walk in your ancestor's shoes for a time
- ☐ By the time you are finished, you will understand and appreciate the person your ancestor really was



Pulling It All Together

- ☐ **The difficult part is done – you have gathered the information you need to begin writing.**
- ☐ **Be accurate and as objective as you can**
- ☐ **What if a cherished family story cannot be fully verified despite exhaustive research?**
- ☐ **If you use quotes, give the source and location.**
- ☐ **What if you find a surprising, disturbing, or embarrassing fact?**
- ☐ **In the end, only you can decide what should be included**



How You Present Your Material

- ☐ It is a technical process as well as a creative process.
- ☐ Make your material easy to read by following the rules of correct grammar and free of errors.
- ☐ Ask someone else to check over your writing for misspelled words, awkward sentences, punctuation problems and, in general, for technical errors.
- ☐ Often, we are so involved in *what* we are saying that *how* we say it suffers. An outside reader will help you catch those minor errors. Make sure you say what you intended to say.



Final Thoughts

*** “You have finished writing your family history.**

You have spent time and energy researching, writing, and preparing your manuscript.

You have gained a greater interest in history because now it has a special meaning to you.

You have become acquainted with some very interesting people, your ancestors.

You have a better understanding of your own heritage and why it is significant to you.

Perhaps you have even clarified your own goals.

You can leave a memorable record for your descendants.

Your record tells about the lives of your people, who they were and what they accomplished.

You have become a link between the past and the present.

Your history will help weld families closer together.”

* Dixon, Janice T., Ph. D., “Family Focused: A Step-by-Step Guide to Writing Your Autobiography and Family History”, Mount Olympus Publishing, Wendover, NV, 89883, 1997, ISBN 0-9656919-6-9 ; Chapter 17, page 199

Appendices

Publishing or Reproducing Your Work

Sources

Publishing or Reproducing Your Work*

- ☐ Let your family know you have written a family history. They may be willing to help subsidize the book.
- ☐ You can write or email family members asking if they are interested in paying for a copy for \$... - determines how many copies to have printed and the type of bindings you can afford.
- ☐ Whether you photocopy, typeset, or self-publish, there are some guidelines to follow.
- ☐ Assembling your book
 - ❖ Title page with name and date
 - ❖ Copyright page
 - ❖ Foreword. Optional, an introduction written by someone else
 - ❖ Preface. Optional, your statement about your book; why you wrote this history
 - ❖ Table of Contents
 - ❖ Illustrations
 - ❖ Prologue or Introduction. The first chapter can serve as that introduction
 - ❖ Body of book divided into chapters that organize the entire work
 - ❖ Appendices – optional
 - ❖ Index

*Dixon, Janice T., Ph. D., “Family Focused: A Step-by-Step Guide to Writing Your Autobiography and Family History”, Mount Olympus Publishing, Wendover, NV, 89883, 1997, ISBN 0-9656919-6-9 ; Chapter 24, “Publishing or Printing Your Book”



Reproducing Your Work*

- ☐ **Easiest way is to photocopy and have it bound at a copy shop. Use good quality acid-free bond paper.**
- ☐ **Desktop Publishing.** You can achieve a printed look by using word processing or publishing applications. Can be any size format up to 8 1/2” by 11”. You can print at home or have a copy shop print and bind it.
- ☐ **Self-Publishing.** You arrange with others to print, copy photos, and bind the book. It will be less expensive to photocopy, if you are making less than 500 copies.
- ☐ **Vanity or Subsidy Publishers.** You pay to have everything done by the vanity press.
- ☐ **Royalty Publishing.** If you feel that your book will appeal to a wide market outside you family, you can send your manuscript to a publisher. Family histories are a specialty market. You get the royalties.

FamilySearch Wiki: “FamilySearch Library Donations”, “A Guide to Printing Your Family History”

*Dixon, Janice T., Ph. D., “Family Focused: A Step-by-Step Guide to Writing Your Autobiography and Family History”, Mount Olympus Publishing, Wendover, NV, 89883, 1997, ISBN 0-9656919-6-9 ; Chapter 24, “Publishing or Printing Your Book”

Sources - 1

❑ **Dixon, Janice T., Ph. D., “Family Focused: A Step-by-Step Guide to Writing Your Autobiography and Family History”, Mount Olympus Publishing, Wendover, NV, 89883, 1997, ISBN 0-9656919-6-9**

❑ **FamilySearch Wiki: https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Main_Page**

[Go to the FamilySearch/Search/Research Wiki - type in any of the titles in the search box.]

- ❖ **Writing Your Family and Personal History**
- ❖ **Preparing a Family History**
- ❖ **FamilySearch Library Donations**
- ❖ **Start Family History by Writing What Is Known**
- ❖ **A Guide to Printing Your Family History**
- ❖ **What to do with the genealogy and family history I collected?**
- ❖ **Creating a Personal History**
- ❖ **Creating a Family History**
- ❖ **Tips for Writing Family History Books**
- ❖ **United States History**
- ❖ **United States Timeline**

❑ **3-22-2023 Class Handouts**

- ❖ **1. this notes pages printout**
- ❖ **2. Resources, “Writing Your Life Story and Theirs”, 22 March 2023, Edgewood FamilySearch Center**
- ❖ **3. “Put Some Meat on Them Bones: Telling the Stories”, RootsTech RT1049, Rosemary Cantrell, the fhg, item p**
- ❖ **4. “Writing and Publishing a Family History”, Darcey Brock, Joan Guckenberger, and Eileen Lund-Johnson, St. Croix Genealogical Society, 21 November 2019**

Sources - 2

❑ The Family History Guide: <https://www.thefhguide.com/vault.html>

- ❖ Click on Vault

- ❖ Scroll down to Section 14.

- ❖ Legend: AA=AmericanAncestors | AC=Ancestry | AF=Ancestral Findings | AJC=AmyJohnsonCrow | AR=Archives.com | BOU=Boundless Genealogy | FE=FamilyEducation | FHD=FamilyHistoryDaily | FHF=FamilyHistoryFanatics | FL=Family Locket | FS=FamilySearch | FTM=FamilyTreeMagazine | GE=GenealogyExplained | GI=GenealogyInTime | GM=GenealogyMagazine.com | GTV=GenealogyTV | LDS=LDSGenealogy.com (non-denominational) | LT=Legacy Family Tree | MH=MyHeritage | OT=Olive Tree Genealogy | PR=PriceGenealogy | PZ=Puzzilla.org | RIV=Riverton FamilySearch Library | RT=RootsTech Blog site | TH=Thoughtco.com | WDY=WhoDo YouThinkYouAre

- ❖ Section 14. Stories

- Main

- Storytelling

- See next 3 pages for titles of videos and articles A = ARTICLE V = VIDEO

Sources - 3

❑ 14. Stories:

- ❖V [RT: Getting Prepared to Write Your Story \(32:52\) - 2022](#)
- ❖V [FS: Why Family Historians Need to Tell Family History Stories \(19:10\) - 2021](#)
- ❖V [RT: Collecting Family Stories \(5:19\) - 2021](#)
- ❖V [RT: Documenting Underrepresented Family Stories \(21:07\) - 2021](#)
- ❖V [RT: How to Write Your Life Story in 5 Pages or Less \(58:28\) - 2017](#)
- ❖A [FS: 10 Steps to Writing an Engaging Family History - 2019](#)
- ❖A [FS: Flesh Out Your Family History Stories with Historical Context - 2018](#)
- ❖A [FS: Places to Look for Engaging Details about Your Ancestors - 2018](#)
- ❖A [RT: Bring Your Ancestors' Stories to Life with Compelling Details - 2018](#)

Sources - 4

- ❖ A [FS: 10 Apps for Capturing and Sharing Your Family's Story - 2017](#)
- ❖ A [FS: Tap into the Power of Your Family Stories - 2017](#)
- ❖ A [AR: Six More Ways to Find Your Family History Muse - 2013](#)
- ❖ A [AR: Plot Like a Pro: Three Simple Steps to Creating a Compelling Family History Narrative - 2013](#)
- ❖ A [AR: Write Your Life Story - 2012](#)
- ❖ A [AR: Writing the Story of Stories - 2012](#)
- ❖ A [AR: Why We Don't Write, and How We Can - 2012](#)
- ❖ A [LDS: Going Beyond Just Names and Dates](#)
- ❖ A [FTM: 16 Things to Write Down about Yourself](#)

Sources - 5

❑ Storytelling

- ❖ [V RT: How to Find Your Story in the Facts \(49:23\) - 2022](#)
- ❖ [V RT: The Power of Storytelling \(20:23\) - 2022](#)
- ❖ [V RT: Capturing Family Sayings \(3:10\) - 2021](#)
- ❖ [V AC: Telling Your Family Stories \(25:00\) - 2013](#)
- ❖ [A Writing an Ancestor Short Biography - 2022](#)
- ❖ [A RT: 3 Tips to Make You a Great Storyteller - 2017](#)
- ❖ [A RT: 7 Fantastic Storytelling Tools and Apps - 2017](#)
- ❖ [A FHD: How to Preserve Your Own Life Story, and Why You Should](#)
- ❖ [A FS: Put Some Meat on Them Bones: Telling the Stories](#)